

TOPICS OF THE THEATRE

A PIONEER IN THE DISCOVERY OF INTERESTING PLAYS.

Henry Miller's Latest Novelty at the Bijou by H. S. Sheldon. A Play on Divorce—Reversal of an Old Formula—An Example of a Wicked Play.

Henry Miller is such an intelligent pioneer in his search for new plays that it is rather a pity to see him unprovided with some permanent and dignified field for the exploitation of his ideas. In the present frenzied condition of theatrical affairs it is scarcely conceivable that any drama hurriedly produced at the little Bijou Theatre could arouse the community to any appreciable degree of excitement. In "The Great Divide," with a more conventional theme, Mr. Miller has shown that he has a much broader horizon in his judgment of dramatics than some of his managerial contemporaries. His judgment has at times been in error, as in the case of the later dramas from the pens of Charles Rann, Kennedy and William Vaughn Moody, but in both cases he had the justification of popular plays by these authors. It was Mr. Miller who had the courage to recognize the unique merit that resided in A. E. Thomas's witty comedy of American life which was so successful here last spring.

So it is rather discouraging to see him with no more dignified theatrical roof over his head than the Bijou. He has again brought to New York audiences a play of American life that possesses some qualities in common with those that gave the actor such reputation as a judge of the contemporaneous manuscripts that arrive in his mail. "The Havoc" treats of divorce, and its topic at once makes it appropriate to this city and country. Dramatists are fond of saying that divorce is not an interesting question in our social fabric for a variety of reasons, nearly every one of which is the result of some managerial prejudice.

Dramatists who usually quote the managerial opinions which they have been compelled to defer to, will tell you that divorce may not be the theme of a play of American life unless there be some new treatment of the old questions. Such a new light on them being impossible, there is no chance of success in such a play. Another favorite argument against the drama of divorce is the necessity of having the heroine old enough to be married. This objection is founded on the managerial impression, which has almost hardened into one of the conventions of their belief, that the public refuses to interest itself in a girl out of her teens. Yet to others than authors and managers who provide the drama for our public it would seem that no subject lies so close to certain phases of our life just now, as the question of divorce.

What the popular success of "The Havoc" may be there is no means of telling. But it is a strikingly honest and straightforward study of a situation that has many prototypes in our civilization. It is its frankness and its uncompromising presentation of a slice of our middle class life that makes it seem so much more foreign than American in its dramatic methods.

Anybody who reads the newspapers knows what an enterprising factor for evil the "boarder" is to the workingman's family may be. His domestic destructiveness is not nearly so well advertised now as it used to be. There is nowadays the pressure of much more important news on the columns of the newspapers than the domestic tragedies of the police courts reveal. So the "boarder" as the incentive to family unhappiness has ceased to be as notorious as he was when he was a more prominent figure in the news of the day.

But he is no doubt just as active in evil. It was the act of the husband in Mr. Sheldon's play that transferred the scene of the boarder's drama from the police to the divorce court. When he discovered that his wife loved the interloper, he did not take the vengeance that would have brought him before the public. He allowed the two to marry after the ordinary processes of the divorce court. Then he returned to take in their life the place of the man who was now the husband of the woman he had debauched before he married.

Of course there is no happiness for the man and wife. Their bargain has turned out as such compacts usually do. So they separate after another crime has been laid on the shoulders of the man who as the "boarder" destroyed his friend's happiness. Yet there is the implication that there may be some bliss in store for the two when they have had time to forget the "boarder" who had separated them. This simple story of rather drab life is all that Mr. Sheldon's play contains. But there are a naturalness and a frankness about the means of its recital that suggest the Continental dramatists in their method of dealing with similar topics. It is its truthfulness to certain phases of life that will endear it to the public that finds its way to the Bijou. It will be from these same qualities that observers of the theatre will expect to hear of him again. Then it is to be hoped that in drawing a situation so directly from life, he may also take one that is not so readily capable of other than a serious interpretation.

There are few episodes in daily existence that may be made ridiculous by slight changes in form. It is a bromide certainty that the sublime and the ridiculous are separated by only a short distance. There is nothing sublime that we recall about "The Havoc." And the distance between the actual and the ridiculous is much shorter. It seems indeed almost the shortest distance between two points. It is made even easier to traverse because of the readiness to laugh at what may offer the slightest excuse to certain types of theatre loafers. But the cracking of thorns under a pot never yet has been potent to destroy the memory of such good work as this new author by his thorough and dignified recital has exhibited in the new play at the Bijou. It may be advisable therefore to repeat the regret that Mr. Miller has no place for the trial of his theatrical experiments more dignified than the little theatre in Broadway.

NEW PLAYS OF THE WEEK

FANCIFUL IDEAS IN TWO OF THE PRODUCTIONS.

"The Faun" and "The Scarecrow" invoke the aid of the Supernatural. Lena Ashwell in "Judith Zerkine"—Miss Van Studdiford in a Comic Opera.

Miss Lena Ashwell, who has been absent from Broadway for five years, will return to New York to-morrow, when at the Astor Theatre she will be seen in the title role of "Judith Zerkine." The drama, by C. M. S. McLellan, has its scenes laid in Minotown, Pa., which may be taken as a type of the localities in which there is an industrial trust through crushing competition has put a competitor out of business and thrown thousands of workmen out of employment. Led by Judith Zerkine, who has also lost her job, the men have attacked the new plant and soldiers have been called out to quell the riots. It is at this point that the need of the trust decides to have a first hand view of the situation he has created. He comes to Minotown, and, figuring as a correspondent for his own New York newspaper, he learns more of the inwardness of things than he has ever guessed before. As the reporter he interviews Judith, finds her intelligent, well read, wholeheartedly enthusiastic and beautiful. This is the situation that exists at the time the curtain rises on the first act of the drama. Miss Ashwell will be assisted by Charles Waldron, John E. Kellard, Gordon Johnstone, Howard Kyrle, Donald Gallagher, Walter Clifton, Edward Langford and Charles Dowd.

William Faversham will present Edward Knoblauch's comedy "The Faun" at the Theatre to-morrow evening for the engagement of four weeks. The theme around which Mr. Knoblauch has woven his story is unique. He has introduced as a central character a faun, the god of the shepherd. This faun wanders into London one night and meets a nobleman who has lost all his money on the races and is about to commit suicide. The faun, whose spirit lives with the nobleman, is able to foresee winners, so the nobleman regains his fortune and in return the faun is dressed as a human being and introduced into society as a prince. He mingles with all classes, endeavors to reform them all, causes trouble by his blunt and outspoken comment and eventually straightens out many difficulties, including a hopelessly entangled love story. Mr. Faversham will impersonate the faun. The others in the company are Julie Opp, Mabelle Crawley, Nina Herbert, Alice Oldham, Martin Sabine, Albert Grant, Frank Hollins, Lionel Belmont and Harry Redding.

Another fantastic play new this week will be Percy McKaye's "The Scarecrow," in which Edmund Breece will appear as the Devil at the Garrick Theatre on Tuesday evening. The play is an allegory of Colonial New England days, and is said to contain a highly dramatic and intensely human story, which cannot well be summarized. It shows how a soul may be born through the suffering caused by the discovery of its own ridiculousness and incompleteness. The theme of the play is during the days of witchcraft in the Massachusetts colony, and one of the characters is a scarecrow who is brought to life by the Devil to carry out the revenge of a witch. Henry B. Harris has surrounded his star with a cast of well known and capable players, including Alice Fischer, Frank Reicher, Fola La Follette and Brigham Royce.

Tuesday evening also brings Grace Van Studdiford in the Parisian comic opera "The Paradise of Mahomet" at the Herald Square Theatre. The music of this imported production was written by the late Robert Planquette, the composer of the "Chimes of Normandy," and the book and lyrics are the work of Henry Bloncourt. It was first produced at the Théâtre des Variétés in Paris in 1906 and enjoyed a run of nearly two years. The scenes are laid in Constantinople and plot concerns a wealthy English widow who is kidnapped by a Turkish prince while the wedding guests are awaiting her marriage to a man who she only has money. Plenty of comic opera complications are promised as well as picturesque scenery and costumes and a chorus that can really sing. Among those who will aid Miss Van Studdiford in the presentation are Maude Odell, Harry MacDonald, Bernice Merston, George Leon Moore, Robert Pitkin, Karl Stall and Florence Kolb.

Gustav Amberg will offer his season of performances in German at the Garden Theatre with Herr Ernst von Possart and his Munich company to-morrow night. Eckermann-Chatrains' "Friend Fritz" will be the bill for Monday and Friday nights at the Garden. On Wednesday night "The Learned Women" will be given, and Thursday night the bill will be "The Wise Man." On Wednesday night Herr von Possart will revive for the first time this season Bjornstjerne Bjornson's comedy of manners, "The Failure" ("Das Fallissemant").

Miss Ellen Terry will make her final New York appearance on Wednesday evening at Carnegie Hall. She will enact many scenes in which she appeared when a co-star with Sir Henry Irving and will show the "Heroines of Shakespeare," both triumphant and defeated. The Irish business man has learned to know them in more than half a century on the stage in Shakespearean roles.

At the Lyric Theatre Paul Armstrong and Wilson Mizner's drama of the New York underworld is on view. Richard Bennett, James Lee Finney, W. J. Ferguson, Emmett Corrigan, Ada Dwyer and Catherine Calvert head a splendid cast.

William Gillette bids farewell to local playgoers this week with a varied repertoire of his famous plays at the Garden Theatre. On Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday evenings and at the Saturday matinee he will resound in the farce comedy "The Private Secretary." On Wednesday afternoon and Thursday evening he will present "Too Much Johnson," a comedy of the "tired business man" type. The play is perhaps most closely associated with his name, "Sherlock Holmes."

"The Gambler" continues its very successful run at Maxine Elliott's Theatre. Charles Klein's gripping drama of bank manipulation stands well at the head of this season's serious plays and will undoubtedly remain for many months.

George M. Cohan's "Get Rich Quick Wallingford" at the Gaiety Theatre contains a big gallery of strikingly amusing American types and the plot is so encouraging that the "tired business man" who sits up and takes notice. Hale Hamilton has won praise for his portrayal of Wallingford.

Ethel Barrymore enters upon her third week in Piner's delightful comedietta, "Trelawny of the Wells," at the Empire Theatre. The play is perhaps Piner's greatest and it is well acted. Charles

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Billie Burke, as charming in her new comedy "Suzanna," as in any of her previous plays, will have completed the first month of her New York run at the end of this week. Not only does she play in this piece her rare beauty and charm, but she also shows herself once more to be an actress of no little ability.

William Collier continues in "I'll Be Hanged If I Do" at the Comedy Theatre. He deserves praise for the production, for in addition to playing the star part he wrote the play in collaboration with Edgar Selwyn and staged it himself. "I'll Be Hanged If I Do" tells the humorous story of a New York "benderfoot" who goes to a Nevada mining town and there proves himself to be a man.

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Director Burgarth will appear in the leading parts of several plays in the Irving Place Theatre this week. "Die Anna Liese" will be played to-morrow and on Wednesday. On Tuesday "Pierrot Stairs" will be offered and "Die Reubens" will be played on Thursday. "Wilhelm Tell" is announced for Friday and Saturday evenings and "Heimat" will be the Saturday matinee production.

"Pomander Walk," the quaint little play of England in 1805 at Wallack's, is the season's theatrical novelty. The scene which shows the little crescent of Queen Anne houses out Chiswick Road, is unique and the play has been declared charming by both reviewers and the public.

"Vanity Fair," the dramatization of Thackeray's novel, which received its premiere at the New Theatre on Saturday evening, January 7, with Miss Marie Tempest as guest artist, will remain the bill for all of this week. Miss Tempest plays the role of Becky Sharp.

Maurice Maeterlinck's fairy play, "The Blue Bird," begins its last week at the Majestic Theatre to-morrow. Following its withdrawal the play will return to the New Theatre, where it will be placed in the new act will be added. The date of the presentation at the New Theatre has not been decided upon.

"The Concert," at the Belasco Theatre, now has a run of four months to its credit and the end is not yet in sight. Leo Ditrichstein has treated the eccentricity of genius in an interesting way and acts the part of the fickle pianist in a praiseworthy manner.

Blanche Bates has lost none of her former popularity since she assumed the comedy part which dominates "Nobody's Business" at the Theatre. Her performance in the lighter role gives new evidence of her versatility.

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"Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm," the play adapted from Kate Douglas Wiggin's novel, is enjoying a prosperous career at the Republic Theatre. It tells a simple, happy story. Edith Taliaferro has the name part.

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AMUSEMENTS.

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The following artists will sing:

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THE NEW THEATRE

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5th Symphony, Op. 67, in B-flat major, 3rd movement, 4th movement, 5th movement.

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SOLOISTS NEW YORK

CLAUDE MAHLER, Conductor.

TO-DAY AT 8 PRECISELY

CLAUDE MAHLER, Conductor.

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